

The Highland Council

Lochaber Committee - 19 October 2016

Agenda Item	6
Report No	LA/21/16

FORT WILLIAM OFFICE PROJECT AND FORMER FORT WILLIAM PRIMARY SCHOOL UPDATE

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

Summary

This report provides Members with a) an update on progress on the new Fort William Council Offices and b) a proposal for redevelopment of the former Fort William Primary School.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The former Fort William Secondary School has lain derelict for over twenty years and in 2015 Highland Council agreed that it should be converted to provide new Council offices. By eliminating the need to continue leases on Lochaber House and Fulton House, this project will realise around £400,000 of annual revenue savings.
- 1.2 In 2015, the requirement to retain the adjacent Fort William Primary School was removed when pupils transferred to the new Lundavra Primary School.

2.0 Fort William Office Project (FWOP) update

- 2.1 After approval was received from Highland Council for redevelopment of the former Secondary School and tender processes carried out, Robertson Northern was appointed as the main contractor. Work started on site in July 2016 with occupation estimated at end-August 2017.
- 2.2 The new offices comprise redevelopment of the existing B-listed structure with the addition of a contemporary extension. The building will accommodate the majority of staff currently based in Lochaber House and Fulton House. However, Care and Learning staff will transfer to Camaghael which is being refurbished to form a new Family Centre which will see all staff involved in the health and welfare of children brought together in one base.
- 2.3 The FWOP will deliver a new Service Point (including provision of self-service pods); a bespoke Marriage / Ceremony Room; new Council Chambers and meeting rooms as well as 'back-office' facilities for around 60 staff. New technology and flexible working maximises the efficiency of the space and as well as reducing costs, will also deliver much reduced carbon emissions due to the energy efficiency measures being introduced.
- 2.4 It is expected that a public sector partner will also move in to the new offices which fits well with the co-location agenda, providing a more joined up approach to delivery of services to the public. It is anticipated that the partner will be delivering an expanded service which will increase employee numbers and provide an established base for many years to come.

3.0 Project Progress

- 3.1 Work started on site in July 2016 and is estimated to be completed by late summer 2017. Discussions are ongoing with a public sector partner regarding a capital or revenue contribution towards the project. Historic Environment Scotland has awarded £240,000 for the conservation of the historic building. A further update will be provided to the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee.
- 3.2 Works on site have included clearance of vegetation including treatment for Japanese knotweed, work to the former secondary school to consolidate walls and insert a new steel frame, and site preparation for laying the foundations of the new extension.

4.0 Former Fort William Primary School

- 4.1 The adjacent B-listed former Fort William Primary School became vacant during 2015 when the pupils transferred to the newly-built Lundavra Primary School. An application for planning permission and Listed Building Consent was made recently and has yet to be determined.
- 4.2 If permission is granted, the project would see the building being converted to provide a new Archive and Search Room (currently situated in Lochaber College), records store, meeting room and offices for a public sector partner.
- 4.3 The anticipated project cost for conversion of the former Primary School is £1,500,000 with some being funded by an external partner.
- 4.4 A report will be presented to Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee on 2nd November presenting the business case for the conversion and seeking the necessary funding.

5.0 Implications

- 5.1 There are no immediate Resource, Legal, Equalities, Climate/Carbon Clever, Gaelic or Rural Implications in the report. However, redevelopment of both buildings will have a positive impact by reducing revenue requirements, providing more accessible space and reducing carbon emissions.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- i. Consider progress on the redevelopment of the former Secondary School and
- ii. Note the intention to redevelop the former Primary School subject to statutory approvals being achieved

Designation: Stuart Black, Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 3 October 2016

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